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DESIRABLE AMENDMENTS OF THE SMITH-TOWNER BILL¹

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I am anxious, as I am sure that every American school officer is, to be perfectly clear in making statements with regard to the Smith-Towner Bill. There has been some disposition on the part of the friends of this bill to insist on a caucus and to hold that this bill is the one and only way of getting a federal agency for the promotion of education. When some of us have objected to this or that feature of the bill, we have been told that the bill will doubtless be amended in the course of its passage by Congress, but that it must not be criticized by educators whose rights seem to have been abrogated with the presentation of the bill; and we have then been forced, so far as the friends of the bill could bring that about, to be counted for the bill plus its unknown revisions or to be counted against the federal department.

Mr. Chairman, if there is a caucus here and we must be for the present bill in detail and for the reference of all revisions to Congress rather than to councils of educators, then I wish to give notice that however lonesome it may be outside, I intend to leave the caucus. I am especially sorry to go if the only man whom I am likely to find outside is my colleague, Professor Burris, because I like his bipartisan board just exactly as well and no better than I do the nondescript thing set up in the Smith-Towner Bill. If, on the other hand, this is not a caucus but a forum for the presentation of amendments proposed by educators, I crave permission to stay and be a part of the constructive deliberations which aim at the end that we are all prepared to defend, namely, the erection of a truly national agency for the guidance of education in the United States.

I am very sure that it is legitimate to ask for a redrafting of this bill in some of its major sections. The original draft was made

¹ Address delivered before the Society of the College Teachers of Education, February 23, 1920, at Cleveland, Ohio.

as an emergency measure in the midst of the war. The National Education Association Commission knew that there were grave objections to the bill as drafted by such organizations as the council representing the higher institutions of the country. Again the N. E. A. Commission in its haste to get the bill in shape decided to avoid an open break with the Federal Board for Vocational Education by omitting any mention of that board. It is a well-known, though not a generally discussed, fact that the Director of Vocational Education appeared before the commission and threatened opposition if the Vocational Board were mentioned in the bill. Thereupon, in the name of political expediency, a war formula putting it up to the President to cut the Gordian knot was drafted into the bill and the Vocational Board was left to be taken in or omitted as the President might determine.

I wish at this time to present very earnestly a plea that the whole matter be recanvassed. There are many of us who think it is a cardinal principle of American education that there shall be only one school and that this unit school shall be broad enough to include both vocational education and academic education. We cannot contemplate with any complacency whatsoever the prospect of a department of education at Washington debarred by political expediency or any other form of evasion from participation in the federal organization of vocational schools. Certainly this issue will have to be faced immediately after the passage of the bill. Can there not be devised some way of facing it now and focusing on the solution of this problem and like problems the educational thought of the country?

I am the more insistent in my plea because it has come to be my settled conviction in the months that have passed that very few teachers have even read the Smith-Towner Bill. The teaching profession has not passed deliberate judgment on such matters as the acceptance of the principle of the Overman Law in the drafting of this bill.

Furthermore, there is clear evidence that the evasion practiced in the drafting of the bill has been of no avail. The Childrens' Bureau, for example, is not at all unaware of the implications of the bill nor is it one whit less pronounced in its attitude than it would be if the name of the bureau were explicitly set down in the organizing paragraph. The same is true of the rest of the bureaus which are marked for absorption.

Let us admit that in war time it was inexpedient to try to thrash out all these matters. I believe that a strong step could have been taken even in war by gathering in conference all the chief educational agencies of the nation and by working out in conference a policy which could stand forth as clear and comprehensive. I do not believe that there is statesmanship in evasion. I hold that what was right and desirable then has become imperative now.

I should be willing to offer this as the sole contribution which I bring to the discussion if I believed that any infelicities in my mode of presenting the pleas which I have made or am about to make could be cured by silence on other matters. I have no wish to blockade the organization of a strong federal department, and if the promoters of this bill will organize a comprehensive conference, including those divisions of the federal government which are most directly concerned in education and such bodies as that represented by Mr. Capen, and will submit to such a conference the revision of the bill, I for one will agree that they have done their duty.

In the meantime, in the spirit of constructive criticism, I venture to deal with another point. I take it that we are all agreed that the new federal agency, whatever it is, should be strong. This demands, to my thinking, that the department be equipped to carry on certain forms of investigation and to carry out certain forms of publicity which are not now possible to the Bureau of Education. The theory of those who drafted the Smith-Towner Bill was that the department will become strong by virtue of the hundred millions of dollars which it distributes to the states. And yet the revised draft of the bill goes to the extreme in making it clear that the gift of this money to the states will not be a source of strength to the new department. Quite the contrary. The new department is loaded with the routine of auditing the fund and it is explicitly denied any supervision over its expenditure. In other words, the auditing of the hundred million becomes a heavy burden and not a source of strength. For this vast job of auditing and setting up systems of accounts the department is supplied with an initial appropriation which, it was pointed out to the N. E. A. Commission, is inadequate.

At this point I wish to be perfectly clear. There is no evidence in the bill or in any published discussions of it by the commission

that a single appropriation is determined in its amount by any scientific study of the needs to be covered by that appropriation. We might be patient with some guesswork about what is needed to cure illiteracy. We might be willing to set down \$7,500,000 for illiteracy and justify the guess by saying that it is sufficiently within the requirements so that it makes no difference if we are vague by a few millions. But such unscientific guessing in the fundamental operating appropriation is another matter. Either the \$500,000 appropriated is an exact, defensible figure, or it is not. Our educational fraternity has been made familiar in recent years with the demand for scientific budget-making. The superintendent of schools in the smallest town in the remotest state has had it laid on his soul to be scientific in his budget; and here we see a great national enterprise set up with a blanket budget which is known to be a guess.

Furthermore, there are some of us, and I belong to that number, who think it is a bad guess. I shall not attempt to persuade you of the correctness of my view. I merely come with the urgent plea that the matter of funds be canvassed in the same scientific way that is advocated for school budgets. I will be concrete far enough to let you see what I mean. I think that somebody should make a list of publication funds now expended by the divisions of the government likely to be absorbed so that when the discussion turns to the appropriation Congress will be informed of the probable cost of publicity. There is at the present time no such figure available. In the same fashion, I think there should be at hand some concrete figures about the operating expenses of other federal departments. Such figures were not at hand when the \$500,000 in the bill was set down.

The reason why it seems to me wise to say these things frankly to each other is that weaknesses of the sort with which I am trying to deal will certainly militate against the bill if it ever really gets before Congress. We are a group of scientific people interested in the task of reforming American school administration and making practices scientific. Our best opportunity to do a fine, detailed, scientific job is slipping through our fingers.

Another matter in which I shall venture to suggest revision touches the big appropriation. There are many of us who think the appropriation is the essential part of the bill. I am not of that

number. In my judgment, it would be better policy and even better politics to separate the appropriation from the section of the bill which creates the department. A representative of the Teachers' Federation stated frankly in answer to my question before a committee to which he was presenting the bill that he regarded the appropriation division as the most important part of the bill. I have been told by those in charge of the bill that congressmen will not support the department unless the bill brings appropriations to their states. Perhaps all this justifies mixing the two sections of the bill, but I wish that such a conclusion could be avoided. I believe we should be infinitely stronger before the country if we had two bills, and I personally favor an appropriation bill only after a strong department has been set up and can tell the country in scientific terms how much federal appropriation is needed and why.

In spite of very clear convictions in these matters just referred to I am prepared for the sake of this discussion to accept the principle of a huge federal subsidy for schools. The question which I wish to raise is with regard to the distribution of the fund. One-half of the fund is to be expended in equalizing educational opportunity in the several states. In order that this fund may accomplish its purpose it is to go to the states one-half on the basis of pupil enumeration, one-half on the basis of the number of teachers employed. This complicated formula is adopted instead of the simple formula of distribution according to population evidently because it was not thought possible to accomplish adequate results toward equalizing school opportunity if states receive moneys in direct proportion to their population or in direct proportion to that which they now have. We may assume, I take it, that a straight population base is accepted as unsatisfactory and the proposed formula is intended to provide a better distribution. If we find out, therefore, how the money would go on a population base we ought to find that there will be much more advantageous distribution on the pupil-teacher base; that is, on the pupil-teacher base, those states which need support should get it in larger degree than they would on the population base.

I have spent a half hour making some calculations for the purpose of comparing the population base with the base proposed in the bill. We have in the Report of the Bureau of Education for

1917 the commissioner's figures for 1916 as the latest figures available. The commissioner's figures differ slightly from those called for in the bill because the commissioner gives the enumeration of pupils between the ages of 5 and 18 years, not between 6 and 21 as called for in the bill. I think this slight variation will not be regarded as essential.¹ From this point on we have clear sailing and can make a comparison very readily. Let us take six states somewhat at random. New York, Indiana, Nebraska, and Oregon may be selected to represent good school support; Alabama and New Mexico, to represent conditions which ought to be aided by federal grant. The selection includes those which have a high per capita expenditure per child and those which have very low per capita expenditures. A table for these six states is as follows:

States	Per Capita Expenditure for Each Child Between 5 and 18 Years	Amount that Would Be Received if Appropriation Were Based on Population	Amount if One-Half Were on Base of Pupils, One-Half on Base of Teachers	Difference
United States.....	\$23.87	\$50,000,000	\$50,000,000
New York.....	29.43	5,045,254	4,328,214	-\$717,040
Indiana.....	34.13	1,383,339	1,444,471	+61,132
Nebraska.....	31.37	624,372	827,681	+203,309
Oregon.....	36.61	410,432	418,787	+8,355
Alabama.....	6.77	1,145,543	1,133,758	-11,785
New Mexico.....	16.76	201,490	188,847	-12,643

It will be seen from this table that the two states most in need of help do not get it, while Nebraska gets a very large addition. New York does not get as much as it would on a population basis which is undoubtedly equitable, but Oregon and Indiana get more. It is a mere matter of chance, therefore, whether the money goes where it should or not.

I submit that the outcome of such an obviously desirable study is not encouraging for those of us who like to find that a law fulfills its pretensions. The bill says that this money is to be used in "providing equally good educational opportunities for the children

¹ There are no census figures later than 1910 for the ages mentioned in the bill. If the calculation is based on the 1910 census figures, the resulting figures differ from those given in the table by only 2 or 3 per cent and do not affect the main issue. If all the figures are taken from the commissioner's tables, the calculations are probably more truly representative of the effect which would be produced by enacting the bill.

in the several states" and then it proceeds on a complex but unsound basis to give a big slice to some of them which already have more than most states, and to those which have very inadequate funds the bill gives the little which comports with their present poverty.

The bill also earnestly exhorts the states to the effect that the use of this money must be for the purpose of securing better teaching, extended school terms, and new library facilities. All was going well in this ambitious plan for the use of the appropriation to improve conditions until the N. E. A. agents began to consort with the representatives of the Teachers' Federation. The item that the Teachers' Federation wrote into this bill, an item that was not in the original draft, is at the head of the list of improvements; it reads "partial payment of teachers' salaries."

Again let me point out that I am not at all out of sympathy with any effort that can legitimately be made to increase salaries. I am not sure that we shall not go ultimately to Washington and to the state capitals and settle the matter of teachers' salaries by central legislation of a perfectly direct, straightforward type. When the time comes for that action, I am in favor of doing what we do openly, directly, and of set purpose. I do not believe that the federal appropriation here described will equalize opportunities; I do not believe it will improve education by the mere process of increasing salaries. If the whole \$50,000,000 went for salaries plus \$50,000,000 more from the states, the aggregate when given to the teachers would make only \$160 per teacher. If this were given to teachers in such a way as to evade a vigorous discussion in every community of the necessity of more revenues for schools, or if it were given without raising the question of more efficient work by teachers, it would in my judgment harm schools rather than help them. I believe in increased salaries; I believe in new demands on teachers for more efficient work. I believe the people ought to be more clearly aware of the necessity of increasing salaries. I believe that teachers ought to be made aware of increased responsibilities when salaries are raised. I am not in favor of anything that will obscure these parallel issues.

So I conclude, Mr. Chairman, as I began. I yield to no man in my demand for a federal agency for the promotion of schools. I am prepared to see those who counsel on these matters come to agree-

ments if their agreements do not evade crucial issues. I think the provisions of the bill ought to be defensible in scientific terms. I suggest as a measure for the accomplishment of these amendments a recanvass of the ground that was covered in haste and by too small a group of people in the emergency of the war, and I submit that so long as the bill is in the immature stage in which it now is, the only intelligent attitude for the school man and the only attitude which is loyal to the schools is the attitude of frank constructive criticism.